

# SAN DIEGO NEWSLINE

SAN DIEGO'S PROGRESSIVE NEWSWEEKLY

APRIL 21-28, 1982

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 28

## The Haig Doctrine: First Strike Policy

BY JOHN SOMERVILLE

Alexander Haig's recent Georgetown speech unequivocally acknowledged that his actual policy is first-use of nuclear weapons, and unwittingly exposed its insanely premised logic. Incredibly, he equates "first-use" with "deterrence," and thus imagines that it is this first-use policy that has been "keeping the peace." He does not see that first-use is the supreme and fatal contradiction of deterrence, since it is the very thing that deterrence is supposed to deter. If nuclear deterrence is not mutual between the superpowers, it does not exist, and the door is open to the final nuclear holocaust. When you threaten first-use, your policy is not nuclear deterrence, but nuclear aggression, or more precisely, unilateral nuclear blackmail.

Consider the self-destructive consequences of Haig's doctrinal argument that first-use is necessary for countering Soviet superiority in tanks. What will follow his first-use? The Soviets will, of course, reply with nuclear weapons. So Haig would have escalated a conventional war we might have eventually won, into a nuclear conflict he himself admits we could never win, or

perhaps even survive. His doctrine is a remedy worse than any disease.

What long ago turned Haig's head was the success of the blackmail policy in the Cuban missile crisis. But since 1962 the Soviets have gained parity, and have been saying two things over and over. One is that they will never again give in to nuclear blackmail, even if it means the end of the world. The other is that they are willing to sign a mutual treaty of no-first-use of nuclear weapons.

Such a treaty was always the most sensible of ideas, but it has had an almost unbelievable history among us. While our government's policy has actually been acceptance of first-use, this was seldom acknowledged by the executive branch, which tries to discourage discussion of it in Congress. At the same time, the many samplings of public opinion I took invariably showed that the great majority not only believed our policy was *no*-first-use, but strongly favored exactly that policy. A national referendum seems needed.

Equally difficult to believe is the fact that the great majority of our public are to this day unaware of the repeated Soviet propos-

als for a no-first-use treaty, made on behalf of the Warsaw Pact to us and NATO in 1976, 1979, 1980 and 1981. The general media virtually ignored these proposals, which were each time rejected by the executive branch behind closed doors, without any discussion in Congress or any explanation to the people. The first official acknowledgement of those proposals came out grudgingly in Haig's speech, couched in the absurd cold-war logic that demands instant, total and scornful rejection of anything Soviet.

By unfortunate concomitance, the cold-war logic acquired a residual ally in the inevitable slowness of language to catch up with the transforming movement of reality. Because nuclear combat arose in the closing stages of a conventional war, we all referred to it as a form of war, nuclear "war." But we can now see that this makes as little sense as it would to refer to strangling a student in the closing stages of a course as a form of education. For the same kind of qualitative difference that exists between homicide and education, exists between the historically new nuclear combat and war: One relatively brief nuclear combat is now capable of doing to all humankind col-

lectively what homicide does to one student. A new name is therefore needed — omnicide, the final madness of some humans killing all humans including themselves.

If we then call things by their right names, who will swallow the logic that says we might win omnicide, or survive omnicide, or make first-use of omnicide? Who will argue that omnicide is patriotic, or just?

The world will not rest easy, nor should it, until all nuclear weapons are abolished. But while this is being negotiated, there must be publicly expressed assurance that neither side is insane enough to make first-use of the homicidal weapons that still exist. A mutual treaty of no-first-use prevents a possibly fatal, uniquely final mis-understanding. It is the needed confirmation that nuclear deterrence is mutual.

John Somerville is professor emeritus at City University of New York, and president of the Union of American and Japanese Professionals Against Nuclear Omnicide, American Section. Dr. Somerville's most recent book is *Soviet Marxism and Nuclear War*. He currently resides in El Cajon and frequently contributes to NEWSLINE.